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LATIN OF TOMORROW

BY A. R. WALLIN
Augustana College

There is today no universal agreement as to the importance of Latin as an educational factor. If, as we believe, solutions to many perplexing social and educational problems will in the future be found, it may be that the problem of Latin study will also be solved. In the meantime the answers to the questions whether the study of Latin should be compulsory or whether, according to present methods, Latin should be studied at all, will be determined by the enlightenment and bias of individuals. The present lack of agreement on these vital questions is undoubtedly due mainly to a want of knowledge and perspective on the part of both the defendant and the opponent. The antagonist of Latin study is more intimately acquainted with his own field of work and hence, naturally though unintentionally, magnifies its importance. The defendant, in turn, may think that he correctly appraises the value of his specialty, but it is probable that he also overestimates its importance relative to other subjects. Furthermore, because of his certainty of being correct in his valuation of the classics, he may fail to notice defects in his teaching method and to realize that the actual results obtained are not the results he predicts. Whatever the cause, the problem is still with us and will remain until both sides, with impartial minds, balance the arguments involved.

A solution of the problem cannot, accordingly, be expected from the present attempt to rally the forces on the side of Latin. The prerequisite for a final statement of the value and object of this study is full expression on both sides. An unbiased jury may then some day be able to sift the pros and cons and to arrive at a just verdict. This will be no easy task, for it is possible that there are no final answers to the questions asked, in the sense that the answers will be the same for all men at all times. The answers must

take into consideration the fact that civilization is progressive, or at least evolutionary. The study of a subject in a certain way and for a certain purpose may at one period be highly desirable, while at another period, because of changed conditions, the same method may be harmful and the same object useless or no longer possible.

At one time the purpose of studying Latin was to acquire ability to read the literature of Rome in the original. During the calm that followed the storms of the dark ages, men of Western Europe discovered the riches which lay buried in the literatures of the Greeks and the Romans. A mastery of ancient languages was necessary to make this their own. In a world where no other books existed, the Greek and Latin books which were found in rapid succession became the textbooks of the schools. The natural result was that for years and centuries the ancients furnished, not only the subject-matter to be studied, but also the vehicle for communication and transmission of knowledge.

Is the situation the same today? There are still a few who fail to see that it is vastly different. These few still fondly cherish the survival of other days that the main, if not the sole, purpose of the study of Latin is to learn to read the language. They apparently have not noticed—to use the words of Professor John K. Lord—“that, if the object of studying Latin is to learn to read it, the present study of it fails of its object.”

Do we not have here the crux of all the battles that have been waged regarding the study of the classics? Why not admit that which all know is a fact? How many educated men who have studied Latin four to six years are in later life able to read with ease a page of Livy or an ode of Horace? The percentage is exceedingly small, and would be discouraging to the teacher and taxpayer alike, if they measured the value of Latin study by the graduate's ability to use the language. The American college graduate, not to speak of the high-school graduate, cannot read Latin and would be surprised if one would intimate that a facility in the use of the language should be acquired.

The fact is that a thorough mastery of the Latin language cannot be acquired in four to six years. A whole life is not too long

to devote to this subject. The grammatical structure is, in the first place, totally different from that of the English. It is no easy task for an English-speaking student to gain facility in apprehending thoughts expressed in a highly inflectional language. This is illustrated by the fact that many students, even after they have studied Latin for years, are unable to understand what they read until they have changed the Latin sentences into English by mechanically following grammatical rules. It is through the medium of English that the Latin is understood. The thought of the original is also often obtained in another way with less mental exertion. If a translation is first read in English, the Latin can be read and understood at sight. As a matter of fact, it is not understood at sight, but in this case as in the former the thought is first grasped in English and is afterward transferred to the Latin page. This is as far as the majority of students ever go.

But if the present study of Latin fails to give the student a reading knowledge of the language, the inference is not that because of this it fails of its object. Latin, fortunately, has based, and will continue to base, its defense on benefits derived from its study which are more fundamental. I say this is fortunate, for otherwise Latin teachers would have to admit that they are defenders of a tragic waste of time. It is, of course, also in a way unfortunate that the defense cannot also be based on the language, for if it could, the results could be tested by all. It is the apparent failure of the study of Latin that gives the opponents of the classics the greater part of their ammunition. The assertion that it is a college fetish is not now so often heard as in the eighties. The teacher of the classics of today certainly, not only recognizes the value of the study of other subjects, but is willing to limit within reasonable bounds the time devoted to his own. The field of human knowledge has grown to such an extent that Latin as a language must from now on occupy a smaller place in the curriculum. If time is to be had for the study of science, shopwork, agriculture, music, and other subjects, less time must be spent on the classics. It is not that the importance of the classics has decreased with the advent of new subjects into the curriculum. The immense gain in importance of the sum of all the other subjects has only limited

the time that the ordinary student can devote to this essential study. In short, conditions have today brought about the following situations: (1) not all students can find time for the study of Latin; (2) the main object of the majority of Latin students can no longer be to learn the language.

It has been said that new educational ideals have brought about a change in the types and ideals of students, that the student of today measures efficiency by outward success rather than by culture of the mind. There can be no question that his ideals have changed, and that the practical adaptability of his studies to his future profession has much to do with his choice of courses, but the conclusion does not follow that he at the same time cannot prepare himself for life in a wider sense. Of course, complete adjustment to the whole of our complex civilization is impossible to any one individual, and therefore it seems right that a student should select his cultural studies from those fields which he by nature is best fitted to master, and which will better fit him for the wider life that will be his. In the case of one student the major attention will be given to science, in the case of another perhaps to the classics. The points of view of the two men in later life will, without question, be different, but it is meaningless to say that either has received a superior education. As a matter of fact, neither has been completely adjusted to modern life. Ability to understand men must be combined with ability to understand things, if the purpose is to understand the civilization of today. If time and individual inclination permitted, the ideal preparation for life would be gained by a thorough study of science and the humanities.

One reason why it appears that the classics are held in less esteem than formerly is that the number of advanced students has immensely increased. Thousands of young men and women, whose task in life will be to fill positions in the business world and the trades, receive today the benefit of a high-school or college education, while the percentage of the total population which pursues studies for merely literary culture, remains nearly the same as when education was not accessible to all. If the classics form an admirable training for these few, it is not more than right that another course of training should be provided for business men and

tradesmen, which will make them more efficient in their especial spheres than was possible before systematic study for these vocations was introduced. The lack of interest in the classics is therefore more apparent than real. The fault lies largely with those teachers of the classics who insist that also this host of new students must receive a training similar to that of the elect few of a generation or two ago. A large number of high-school and college students will continue the study of the language of the Romans, and more particularly of their other contributions to our civilization. A smaller, but sufficiently large, number will specialize in this field and will gain a mastery of the language. These will, as the case is now, be leaders in the realms of thought and literature. In the realms of material comfort and progress there will be other leaders, whose studies have been mainly in other lines.

Furthermore, the chief and sole purpose of the study of Latin by the majority of students in the high school of the future will not be to acquire a reading knowledge of the language. It should here be observed that the phrase, "the study of Latin," is a misnomer. The study will comprise much more than the study of the language. The whole civilization of the ancients will be studied. The place of the Romans in history—and why not of the Greeks as well?—their contribution to language, literature, law, art, commerce, and science of today can well be made the subject-matter of the four years of classical work. It is true that a thorough and intimate knowledge and understanding of these subjects can be acquired only by a first-hand acquaintance with the sources, but it is without question possible through the medium of English to gain a more systematic knowledge of them than that which is gained at present. It is the task of the university to ferret out from ancient authors the true story of the life and thought of ancient times. The university has done and does this, its allotted task, well, though large portions of the story, it must be confessed, lie buried in dissertations accessible to, and read only by, advanced students. Certainly it should not be necessary for generation after generation of high-school students to do this work over and over, when so much work remains undone which would lead to the acquisition of systematic knowledge and would be equally fruitful in forming

such mental habits as can be transferred and applied to life-problems.

The purpose of all education is to train men and women to become socially efficient. He who is better fitted than another to fill the place in society into which his lot is cast may be said to be the better educated. This does not mean that the man who comes out at the top in the political and financial struggle is more highly educated than his fellows. Personal efficiency, so widely preached in our day, is often incompatible with social efficiency. Individual success is often achieved by tramping others under foot. Every educational plan must therefore aim at more than individual aggrandizement. It must, of course, prepare the individual for high efficiency in his life-work, but it must also aim at physical well-being, individual contentment, and a moral improvement, which results in an identification of the interests of others with his own.

Each period in the history of the world has had its own ideals. He who understands these best and who is trained to act in accordance with them, is best fitted for association with his fellows. Each individual as a factor in modern co-operative society should to some extent understand the whole mechanism of society and know what others are doing as well as the part he plays in the whole. It is not enough that he be made an expert in his own life-calling, so that he knows how to operate well the lever which is assigned to him. Man should not be a mere automaton. The courses which a student takes, aside from those which are to prepare him for his life-work, should have the object in view of helping him as a social being. The student should acquire a perspective of modern society, its composition and operation, its creations, material, mental, and moral. To do this it will be found that he cannot limit himself to his own time and people. The present must be understood in the light of the past. The contributions of peoples who have lived before us and the impulses which one generation has given to the following have made modern society what it is. Mistakes have been committed and corrected along the way. These should be noticed, so that we do not through ignorance pay a penalty for action which can be avoided.

This acquired outlook on the past and the present will furthermore become a source of contentment and happiness. The mere casual acquaintance with chemistry, for instance—to take an illustration from another field—gives a man abundant pleasure, though his major interests may be centered elsewhere. He reads with interest of the discoveries in this science. Because he feels somewhat at home in this field, he may even be led to widen his knowledge, while he passes by as something foreign an article on meteorology, which he has not studied. The fact that a man cannot become an expert in all fields is no reason why he should limit himself to one. A wide knowledge of the world, if combined with expert knowledge of one's own field is not dilettantism, but adjustment.

It is in view of this statement of the purpose of education that the value of the study of Latin must be estimated. It is evident that neither this nor any other subject has any justification for inclusion in a non-professional curriculum, if it does not add its mite toward the realization of a better social being and a happier and better individual. Any study is, of course, justifiable, if its purpose is personal efficiency in one's life-work, but there is clearly no purpose in studying anything outside of this, unless it will in some way or other be of definite service for life in a broader sense.

It is my conviction that the mere study of the Latin language for a few years is of great educational value to the student, even if he does not gain facility in reading it. Although better results will in the future be attained by a change in the methods of teaching and in the subject-matter of classic study, it is nevertheless certain that the results attained today are of high value to the student who is equipped for successful work in the Latin classroom. The faithful high-school graduate who has studied Latin for four years has at least gained a wider knowledge of his own language. The daily translation of Latin into his own language necessarily compels him to add to his vocabulary, to discriminate between the value of words, and logically to construct sentences which express thoughts which are new to him. He not only acquires a fluency in the handling of language, but also makes the new thoughts which he handles his own. Furthermore, if his mother-tongue, as

in the case of English, is etymologically closely related to the Latin his insight into the meaning of words becomes deeper, and his use of them more accurate.

It has often been questioned whether the acquaintance that the student gains of the author's thought through a study of the original is better than that gained through the reading of a translation. Alexander Baine, in his "Education as a Science," asserted "that the literary interest in the authors is not felt for want of due preparation." Because the student must use up so much mental effort in getting the meaning of the language, he loses his interest, and "literature is nothing if not interesting." In this there is undoubtedly some truth. The niceties of diction are certainly missed to a great extent by the high-school student of Caesar, Cicero, and Vergil, but I nevertheless hold that his acquaintance with Latin literature differs in several respects very widely from that of a man who has read only a translation. Whether he will or not, and whether he at the time is aware of it or not, there is thrust upon the student, as days go by, an insight into the Roman mind and literature which one unacquainted with the language never gains. The very fact that the student cannot read speedily is in itself of value. Because of this he is forced to observe more closely the language and the thought it expresses. He who has read through works of the ancients only in a translation may have a more complete knowledge of the message which the author wishes to transmit, but he has not the intimate acquaintance with the writer which the slow reader of the original gains.

Other gains made from Latin as now studied are many and of practical value in life. Habit of logical thinking and accuracy of expression in the vernacular are acquired, inasmuch as the facts learned and the procedure followed are to a large extent identical in Latin and English. The classicist does not believe that training in Latin may by transfer be utilized in building a bridge, but he holds that the intense application necessary for success in the Latin classroom compels the student to acquire habits of observation, of attention, and of persistence in innumerable situations in life which in their elements and processes are closely akin to the situations in the Latin classroom.

The student acquires under an able teacher also a certain amount of historical information, some knowledge of literature in its various forms, an acquaintance with conditions and problems of ancient times, and is therefore by comparison able to form a truer estimate of the degree of similarity between his own civilization and that of the past. A broader human sympathy is thereby engendered, for the better we learn to know peoples of other times and climes, the better we understand that men wherever and whenever found are very much alike. To learn that we all have the same virtues and vices, that we are buoyed up by the same hopes and aspirations, and saddened by the same griefs is in itself a lesson in adjustment.

In short, my conviction is that Latin as studied today produces results which are of value for life. Not all, as was stated, should study Latin. Some have not the native ability necessary to acquire benefits commensurate with the time spent. Others whose interests and genius lie in other directions cannot afford to spend their time on Latin. Still, all men of idealistic and analytic minds do now, as in the past, receive a training through this subject, as through no other, which adjusts them to those high positions in life which can be filled only by men of clear thinking and high ideals.

Although this is true of Latin as it is now taught, still there are many who believe that better results may be gained in the future. I need only emphasize the reasons already offered for this belief and repeat what, in my opinion, the Latin course of the future should comprise.

The immediate object of education is adjustment, but beyond this there is an ulterior purpose. It is not enough that the individual so adjust himself that he may live in the world with the least friction. He must learn to take a step in advance. For mere existence without friction an automaton with the right reactions need only be created. But to take a step forward it is imperative that the individual know the reasons for the reactions. He must know what has made the world what it is, what errors of the human race have been eliminated and why. He must, in other words, through the study of the records of mankind learn to avoid a repetition of the mistakes of the past. To take a step in the right direction, which is equivalent to a step in the direction of progress, a

man must be abreast of his time. This he cannot be until he has mastered the past. If modern civilization is a lineal descendant of the ancient, and if the study of one phase of the latter is of importance toward the adjustment of one class of students, it seems evident that the more embracing the courses in the classics are made and the better they are fitted to the needs of different students, the better will they serve their purpose. They will be more likely to produce that social and individual efficiency which makes for progress in the arts, for perfection of our social organization, and for greater individual contentment.

The Latin classroom often lays so much stress on language, in its endeavor to teach a reading knowledge of Latin, that other vital things are forgotten. When once we dare to depart from the conventional mode of imparting instruction, a new era, more rich in results, will be ushered in. Signs of its advent already appear. The secondary school, on the one hand, has raised its voice in response to the new conditions, and demands greater freedom in mapping out the work in the classics. The colleges have also responded by permitting a greater latitude to those who offer Latin for admission. These responses must be considered tentative steps in a process of adjustment, which will continue until this study most effectively plays its part in the education of youth. It is conceivable that instead of spending four years on the study of the Latin language alone, the student of the future will devote a considerable part of this time to the study of the art and literature, of the private and public life of the Romans, of all phases of their civilization. The study of the language will receive its share of attention, but the purely linguistic course will be offered only to those who are especially fitted for the study of language, and whose vocation in life will be within the realms of thought and expression.

The purpose of this paper was not to outline an ideal schedule in detail, but merely to suggest changes, which, in the writer's opinion, should be made. Several tentative plans of work, more or less akin to the foregoing suggestions, have here and there been followed. Since results have not been measured, it is, of course, impossible for anyone to say to what extent the new teaching of

the classics has better served as a preparation for life. Until we can accurately measure results we must be guided in the outlining of courses by a priori reasoning. There can, however, be no question that these new plans of work have inspired a greater interest in the subject in the schools where they have been tried. It is not only the intrinsic difficulty of the Latin language which deters many from selecting it. The reason is rather to be found in their inability to see that a sacrifice of four years to monotony will bring them a recompense worth the price. As a matter of fact, in many instances no worthy recompense is received, for interest in a subject is a prerequisite to its mastery and the resulting training. The study of the classics in the future should be so planned that they offer training to students differently equipped, and the work should be so planned that it demands thoroughness and inspires the necessary interest for its mastery. Aside from making Latin a more valuable educational factor, this would result in the additional gain that more would accept the reasons offered for its study. Many are opponents of Latin because they cannot see what use there is in studying this subject, when the end advanced by its sponsors is not as a rule attained. If the study of Latin is made a study of Roman antiquity in the largest sense, both student and parent will recognize its importance and the validity of the demand that it hold a prominent place in the curriculum of the secondary school.